

VZCZCXYZ0013
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUL #2212 1861046
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 051046Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8816
INFO RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0967
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0899
RHMFIISS/COMUSKOREA J2 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFIISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFIISS/COMUSKOREA SCJS SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 002212

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/05/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV KS JA

SUBJECT: FM BAN CONCERNED WITH JAPANESE SURVEY OF DISPUTED
WATERS

REF: A. STATE 109302

¶B. SEOUL 2197 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Amb. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a July 5 meeting with the Ambassador, Foreign Minister Ban said that South Korea and Japan had shown flexibility and self-control over the ROK survey vessel in the disputed EEZ. The standoff was essentially over because the vessel had made a rapid passage and was now out of the disputed waters. However, Ban said, Japan had stated that it too would do a survey soon, which would be a very big problem for Seoul. The Ambassador said that he hoped both sides would show patience and care in handling the issue. Legally, the U.S. considered that both Japan and Korea had survey rights in the disputed waters. Ban said he did not agree with Washington's legal interpretation. Septel reports on missile discussions. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Foreign Minister Ban told the Ambassador on July 5 that the root of the EEZ dispute revolved around Japan's inability to examine correctly its own history. Dokdo (Liancourt/Takeshima) belonged to South Korea; all South Koreans believed this and President Roh felt very strongly about it. Some decades ago, South Korea had drawn its EEZ from another island, Ulleungdo. The line did not start with Dokdo, because it was consider a mere rock, therefore not relevant according to strict interpretation of the Law of the Sea. However, Japan drew its own EEZ from Dokdo; hence the "overlapping" EEZ claims. For South Korea, this was simply unacceptable.

¶3. (C) However, Ban said, he did not want heightened tensions with Japan, which was why Seoul had proposed a "rapid" survey. Typically, vessels have to be anchored or travel very slowly to conduct maritime surveys. However, this time around, the Korean vessel had cruised through the disputed waters at 10 knots per hour. There were official protests from Japan, but the matter was essentially over, because the survey vessel was now out of the area.

¶4. (C) Still, Ban said, he was worried because Japan was now proposing its own survey. This would be an enormous problem, because Seoul would have to stop it, Ban said.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador said that Japan's history issues were also of concern to the United States. Washington very much wanted to see issues such as the overlapping EEZ handled diplomatically with care. The challenge was to manage these disputed claims because finding permanent solutions were very difficult, if not impossible, at least in the short term.

One way was to allow both sides to conduct maritime surveys, which was Washington's interpretation of the Law of the Sea. Ban said that he was aware of this interpretation, which was not South Korea's view.

¶6. (C) Ban concluded the meeting by emphasizing that he did not want such unnecessary tensions with Tokyo again. After all Japan and Korea were "indirect allies" through the United States. He hoped to conduct "quiet consultations" with Japan to improve the relationship.

¶7. (C) Comment: The survey vessel standoff in the disputed sea quickly became old news with the multiple launches of North Korean missiles. Also instrumental in getting this issue over with quickly was the ROKG's change of plans to significantly reduce the stay of the survey vessel in the disputed waters. According to our calculation, the vessel was in the troubled area for barely two hours, not enough time for a confrontation with a Japanese patrol boat. Still, we can all expect the same difficulties if there are more surveys carried out.

VERSHBOW